

Mechanical Memories

Magazine

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The only UK magazine dedicated to Vintage Penny Slot Machines

Mechanical Memories Magazine

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Editorial

Well, here we are with the September issue (and with any luck, it should actually have September on the front). However, I can't guarantee the rest of the magazine won't be riddled with spelling mistakes. I haven't yet had a chance to recover from my summer season at Brighton, and have had to crash this issue out in literally a couple of days. Very sincere thanks to John Peterson, who has once again contributed a very interesting article, without which I would have been well and truly in the proverbial!

Apologies to those of you who have left messages on my mobile or sent emails, and have had to wait days or even weeks for a reply. I think I've answered most by now, but I'm afraid the school holidays is not the best time to be leaving messages for me (not if you require an answer at least)!

So, was it all worth it? Driving daily to Brighton in the wind and rain? It seems this year was a lot of bloody hard work! Actually, it didn't turn out too bad, but what a God awful summer?!! We've apparently had twice the normal rainfall for August, and only half the normal sunshine. So much for global warming.

Anyway, I'm keeping this short. It's now 2.00 a.m. and I desperately need some sleep.

Till next time

All the best

Jerry

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Gypsy Fortune Teller. Wooden cased electric Crystal Gazer.

Madam Sibille gypsy fortune teller 1930's. Kicking Mule Shooting game.

Ahrens Crystal Gazer, this machine made of cast iron and steel with copper canopy and light on top, cast feet standing at 2400 x 900 x 900mm is one of three known to exist.

Rare Bally Bumper 1936 pinball machine.

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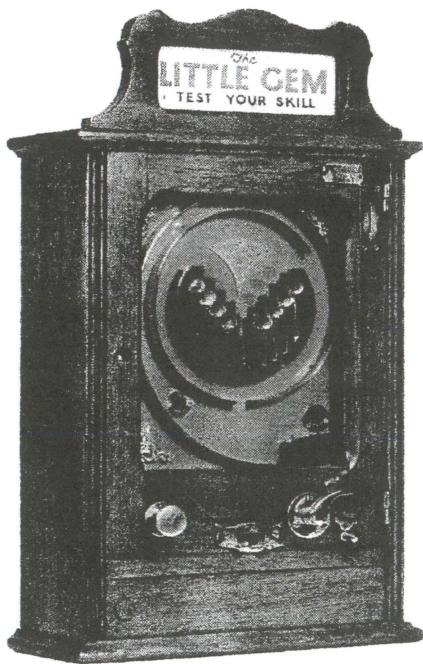
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Tuesday 18 November London

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A 'Little Gem' wall machine by Allwin, mid 1930's, on 1d. play, in small oak case with title pediment
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News and Coming Events

Tragic Pier Fire

The devastating fire on Weston Super-Mare's Grand pier is by now old news. As far as I can ascertain, the cause of the fire still hasn't been established, although investigations so far point to an electrical fault in a deep fat fryer. However, it transpires that the scale of devastation could have been avoided had the fire service been alerted earlier. The pier's fire alarm was activated at 1.35 a.m., but the fire brigade did not arrive on the scene until 6.46 a.m. and only then as a result of a 999 call by a local resident. A private security firm was responsible for monitoring and actioning the pier's alarm system, and an investigation is now trying to establish why the fire service were not alerted when the alarm was activated. In an incredible act of understatement, the chief fire officer said that it appears the fire started "sometime before we got there."

Although the pier's owners have vowed that the pier will be fully restored, it does seem all the more tragic that what started as a small fire should end in such devastation – possibly as a result of sloppy procedures by a private security company.

Auction News

Well, there's plenty to keep us occupied in the coming months! First on the list is the Cameo auction to be held on Tuesday 9th Sept. I received my catalogue a few weeks ago, and there are certainly some impressive lots on offer, although some of the estimates appear a little over-optimistic to say the least. It will be interesting to see how many lots actually sell. I hope to be able to attend, so look forward to seeing a few familiar faces.

Southern counties sent me a catalogue for the sale of the Peter Arnett collection, which takes place on Saturday 13th Sept. This sale will appeal particularly to circus fans, with a considerable number of posters on offer. There doesn't appear to be any slot machines included, but there are some very impressive fairground lots, including: an original 1930s show front, est. £20,000 - £25,000; 97 key Mortier organ, est. £90,000 - £100,000; Aveling & Porter traction engine, est. £35,000 - £45,000 and a Scammell tractor, estimated at a mere £6,500 - £7,500. I just wish I had that sort of money! Southern Counties can be contacted on: 01722 321215

Laurence Fisher sent me a list of the coin-op lots to be included in Bonhams sale on 30th Sept. This comprises approx. two dozen wall machines, mostly allwins, including: Bryans Fivewin, Bullion, Clock and Fruit Bowl; Spangles allwin; B.M.Co Little Gem; R&W Many Happy Returns; rare Love Nest fortune teller; Bradley Challenger; rare Speedway allwin, plus an almost complete set of Nostalgic Machines allwins.

Joby Carter contacted me recently with regard to an auction he's organising for 26th October. It is intended that this sale should include anything related to fairground stuff, from gag cards to complete rides, and will also include vintage slot machines. Entries are invited for all suitable lots. I hope to have more details next month, in the meantime, see Joby's ad. on page 25.

The Big One!

I can confirm that our autumn show and auction will be on Sunday 30th November, and we will be back in Coventry. Entry forms will be included in the October issue of the magazine, so start sorting out your lots and get ready to fill in those forms!

Dates for your diary

Cameo Auction of Vintage Amusement Machines 9th September
Reading, Berkshire

Auction of the Peter Arnett Collection 13th September
Wickham, Hampshire

Bonhams Mechanical Music & Collectables Sale 30th September
Knowle, Nr Coventry

Jukebox Madness 25th & 26th October
Kempton Park racecourse

Joby Carter's Auction of Fairground related items 26th October
White Waltham, Berkshire

Chicagoland Show 14th – 16th November
Illinois, USA

Bonhams Fine Mechanical Music Sale 18th November
Knightsbridge

MMM Vintage Slot Collectors' Show & Auction 30th November
Coventry

Twisted Sisters

By John Peterson

My collection of coin-op is comprised primarily of British made machines. One of the many things that I like about them is the aesthetic balance their creators struck between the use of wood and metal. I also find the fairly simple construction of the games appealing. This allows me to work on them despite my modest mechanical abilities. Due to the much smaller market for these machines when compared to America, there was no economic incentive to create the manufacturing juggernauts that dominated the coin-operated industry here in the United States, companies like Mills or Jennings. A popular slot machine by an American manufacturer would be produced in the tens of thousands. A popular game by a British manufacturer would be lucky to be produced in the hundreds and there were many numbered in double digits or even less. It's all about supply and demand. Due to the much smaller population in the United Kingdom coupled with their stricter laws against games of chance, demand for games was much less than in the United States.

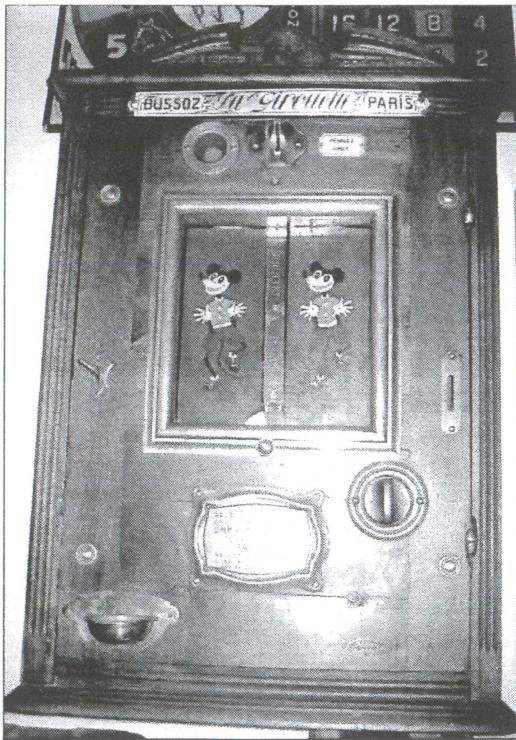
This held true for all the other European countries as well. To compensate for these much smaller markets, manufacturers attempted to poach on the territories of their neighbours. Some manufacturers just shipped their games to other countries and sold them through domestic agents in that country. A second category is the manufacturers who custom-made games for export, tailoring the game for the tastes of the target country. These games came ready-made to play in the coinage of the designated market with instructions written in the language of the targeted nation. Germany sold many games in Britain using this strategy. Most of these were allwins of one form or another. Some of these games made between the two World Wars had the quaint notice "Made in Saxony" in tiny, tiny print somewhere on the face of the game. The common thinking now is that the manufacturers were trying to hide the true country of origin from an English audience still stinging from recent memory of German aggression. As you might expect, German made games are well constructed and extremely reliable performers.

Today's offering is from a third category of foreign-made games, machines that were imported to Britain and then converted by Brits for their own commercial operation or resale in England. This was most likely done by small-time jobbers or companies that acted as agents for foreign manufacturers. As with most of the British games that I see, little manufacturing identification is provided on the game itself. No original identification is definitely the norm with these games that were imported and later modified. If there is any identification, it has nothing to do with the original manufacturer and most likely relates to the resale agent or even the arcade where the game was initially placed. If Dick Bueschel were still alive and writing a book on foreign games, today's game would be in the 'Mystery' section. That is because this

game has been re-cased and reconfigured to increase its appeal to a more adult audience. It is only through the recent efforts of individual collectors that the true origins of this game have become known. Enough of the tease? Let's take a look at **La Girouette** or what I call 'Twisted Sisters.'

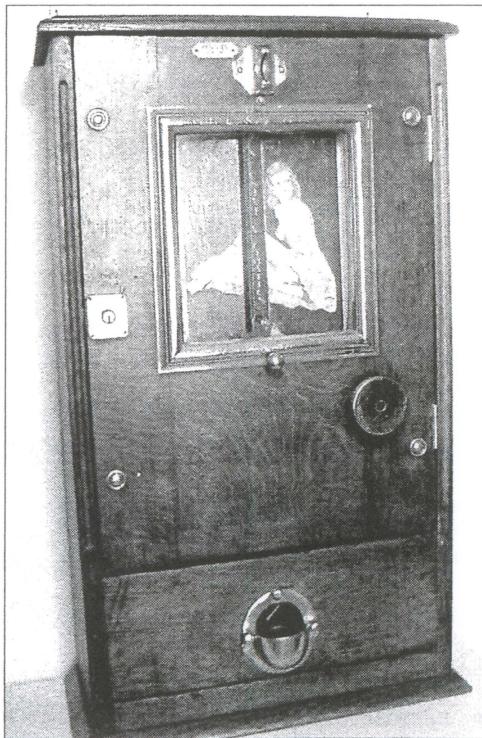
The master of French coin-op was Pierre Joseph Bussoz of Paris, France (1872-1958). Having trained as a clockmaker, Bussoz switched to coin-operated games and became one of France's most successful makers of coin-op. He is best known for his wall machines, roulettes and fortune tellers. He also manufactured jukeboxes. Like the giants in the American field of gambling, Bussoz had a talent for grasping the taste of the public at large and translating it into games with mass market appeal. Many of his roulettes showcased popular figures of the day. These were in addition to his other games that featured historical or mythical characters. If Bussoz were alive and well today, you can be assured that he would have a roulette game named 'The Britney.'

The original Bussoz game underlying my mystery machine was named **La Girouette** (See photo 1 below). Produced in 1914, Bussoz hit upon a novel idea for a new approach to the traditional roulette game.



La Girouette (photo 1)

Up until then, French roulettes had spinning discs with multi-coloured segments upon which to bet. You inserted your coin in one of three colour-coded coin entry slots. The lever was pulled and the disc engaged. If the spinning disc stopped on your colour, a payout was automatically made. This is similar in principle to our slot machine with the primary difference being that with a slot machine, there is no choice of specific winning colour and the payout is determined by internal mechanics, unaffected by player input. Bussoz came upon a new idea. Rather than utilizing a rotating disc or reels, he created a machine with two triangular shaped drums. These two drums are set vertically, side by side, with a single picture painted across each of the mated surfaces. Each pair of surfaces is painted a different colour picture for a total of three scenes. To operate the game, a coin is inserted and then the colour selection is made via a dial knob at the bottom of the picture window. Using that knob, you turn a colour wheel to which one of three colours you want to bet. The game is set in motion and the two drums rotate rapidly on a common gearing until one mated picture stops in view. The colour of that scene determines the winner. The gearing is constructed so that the correct picture-halves will always mate when the drums stop their rotation.



John's version of La Girouette (photo 2)

La Girouette is a fascinating game to watch in operation. In addition, the scenes are very attractive featuring a red Mickey Mouse, a blue donkey and a green dog. Could there be anything more appealing to the masses than that? Wait a minute. Are you kidding me? A mouse and two generic barnyard animals? Ask yourself, what is the point of these machines, anyway? Are they supposed to attract gawkers or gamblers? Let's be honest here. Who do you think were the primary players of these games back in the 1920's and 30's? Children? Gambling was and continues to be the provenance of adults, specifically adult males. (It is only in more recent times that women have joined the ranks of male gamblers. Today, females are a potent segment of the industry and casinos target and cater to the ladies. Back then, gambling was almost exclusively a male vice). If you were to design a gambling machine targeting a male audience, what images would you employ to entice? If you guessed a trio of sexy women, you're right.

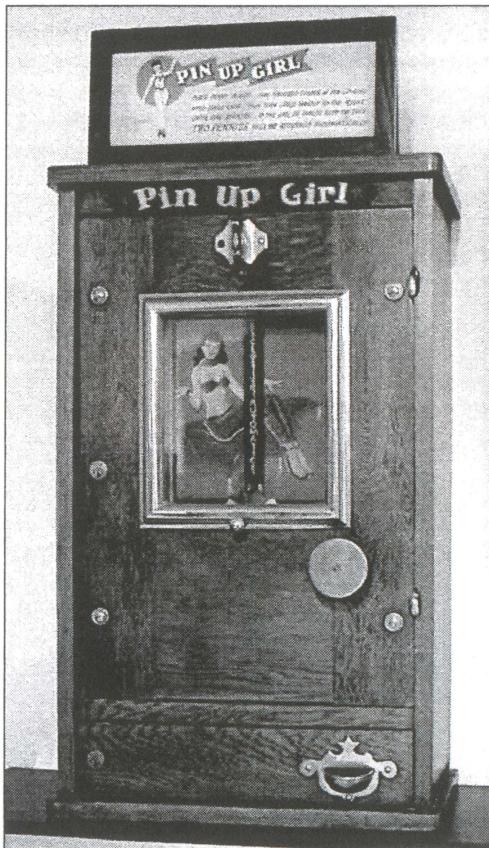
And so it is that my machine (Photo 2) came into being. Once the game reached England, it underwent significant modification. If you compare it to **La Girouette**, you can see that the case was changed from the fluted fruitwood case to the more generic English oak. The original knob was also replaced in favour of this large knurled monster. It takes a manly hand to set the ladies a' spinning! The original machine had the Bussoz name on the thin strip between the painted panels. My game has **Exclusive Automatics** scripted in the same location, (photo 3).



Detail of John's machine (photo 3)

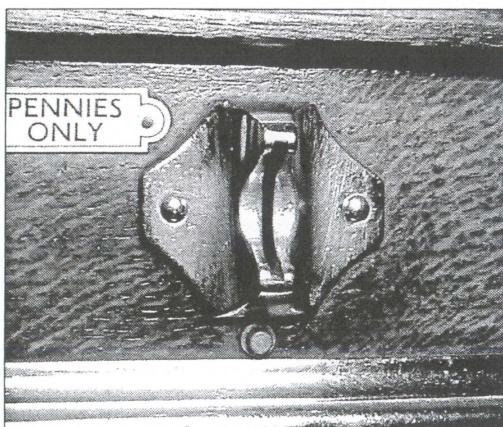
You will also note the colour selector wheel at the bottom of the window. I have seen three other games somewhat identical to mine and two carried this name. None of my English reference books have any information on this company if such a company by that name truly existed.

The major difference, of course, is the pictures on the panels. Goodbye Mickey and the farmyard friendys; hello Lola and the sisters of sizzle! Each of the panels is hand-painted a distinct woman on a different coloured background. Photo 4 is another British example named **Pin Up Girl**. It is the same game as mine but with different ladies. Its payout cup is the traditional French style common to many Bussoz games while mine is the style more common to British machines. All these conversion games take the large British penny and they automatically pay out two pennies if you select the winning lady.



Pin Up Girl (photo 4)

On the whole, French games were more sophisticated than their British or German counter-parts and this game is no exception. One very clever device is the small button immediately under the coin entry, Photo 5. Aware of it for years, I have puzzled over its function. Try as I may, I could not figure out what this little button did besides bug the devil out of me. To my amazement, the mystery was recently solved by collector extraordinaire, Bob Klepner of Australia. Here is what Bob told me. The bet is made by way of selecting the hoped-for winning colour using the knob at the bottom of the window. What would prevent a player from selecting a colour, playing and losing the game, and then moving the colour betting knob afterward to the winning colour and claiming that the machine had not paid out correctly? Not so fast there, Cheater-boy; this machine is smarter than you think. After a game has been played, pushing that small knob under the coin-entry will reset the colour-betting wheel to the colour originally selected. Score: Owner 1, Cheater 0. What a terrific machine.



Anti-cheat button, below the coin entry (photo 5)

It is said that necessity is the mother of invention. While I do not doubt that as true, the more important marketing slogan is: Sex Sells. Some clever entrepreneurs in England in the later '20's or early 30's saw the opportunity to take a unique but staid French game and jazz it up with some sexy female pictures. The result is a memorable game that retains as much appeal today as it did when the sisters took their first twirl. Viva la difference!

THE END

Postscript: If you would like put your own twist on today's story or just talk about European coin-op, drop me a line at jp4@charter.net. Next time, we'll take a closer look at some games that came out around the World Wars. Stay tuned.

Modern Enterprises Ltd

Last month, I requested information on the 'lost' Modern Enterprises machine, **The Opera Singer**. Not surprisingly, I've had no great response! I did, however, receive this from Geoff Felix, who is a renowned puppeteer:

Dear Jerry

I was most interested to read your article in the recent edition of 'Mechanical Memories Magazine' issue 26 which featured the work of Modern Enterprises. One of the things that fascinated me as a child was one such model that stood tucked around the corner on a pier somewhere, probably Bognor. It featured three figures: two musicians and a female who stood stiffly, the lower lip moving while the musicians swayed wildly as the music played, only to come to an abrupt stop. There were others too: clown bands, singing minstrels and the laughing sailor. It was only later that I discovered that this was the work of Len Insull.

In fact there were two. Len Insull senior (1883-1974) had been a music hall artist who had toured the world. He started a new career for himself as the music hall died. He opened a props making business and then supplied grottoes of working figures for Selfridges and later Kennards of Croydon. In the 1920's he made a mechanical cow called 'Freda the Friesian' for the British Empire exhibition in Wembley. This was seen by the King and Queen. In addition, he supplied Davenports magic shop with a range of beautifully made ventriloquial figures.

Len Insull II (1914-1957) worked with his father but developed an independent business supplying ventriloquial figures for Max Andrews. He also worked on the 1951 exhibition in Battersea on the 'Voyage of discovery' ride. It was Len Insull II who worked for Ruffler and Walker and later Ruffler and Deith. His son remembers the 'Sidney knows' machines as well as the Laughing Sailors. I learnt from Mr. Colin Mallory that after his death, a Polish man called Sammy Brodniki worked on making the models. This would be possible as the figures were made using moulds which would have been at the workshop. I understand that Insull did not make the cabinets or the machines and confined himself to the artistic side. After his death, Len Insull I tried to sell his son's business to a puppeteer friend of mine but he did not take him up on the offer.

I understand that a lot of the machines were sold by Bill Ruffler to Jimmy Roderick of Star Amusements in Camden Lock. It would be interesting to know what happened to them after that.

The enclosed photo is of a machine that was at Mablethorpe (See front cover, **Ed.**) I don't know where the machine is now but it is a very fine example of Insull's work. After his son's death, Len Insull continued making figures until he died. He made Archie

Andrews for Peter Brough and the first version of Lord Charles for Ray Alan. I look forward very much to seeing the photo of the opera singer. I feel that she is out there somewhere.....

With Best Wishes,

Geoff Felix

Many thanks for the info, Geoff. Here's the picture of The Opera Singer, although I do wonder whether the machine was actually called **Opera Singers**, as there are clearly two! You'll see from Geoff's email that he recalls a different machine, featuring a woman flanked by two musicians – I wonder what's happened to that?



To see more of Len Insull's work, pay a visit to Geoff's website: www.geofffelix.com. There are a couple of intriguing pictures, which I shall publish next month, once I've had a chance to speak to Geoff for some further info.

And finally, last month I published a picture of Piano Man (one of two known to exist), which I said could be the one on offer in the forthcoming Cameo auction. Well, now that I've seen the online catalogue, I can confirm that the machine to be auctioned is in fact a third (pictured below). It was discovered recently in a cellar, complete with its original record player.



What is it?

Remember this picture that I published last month? I thought a few of you may have had a stab at identifying it, but once again apathy was the easier option! To be fair, you probably had no chance – unless you live in New Zealand.

Garry Summerhays (who is the sole NZ subscriber to this magazine) sent me this some time ago, as he had previously told me of allwin type machines manufactured over there, and I was very keen to see what they looked like. This machine was made in 1971 by Edward Malonson of Auckland, and Garry tells me there is a small firm on the South Island that still makes allwins today. I hope to have more info. soon.



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Ivan 01273 401144

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Rob. 01507 473639
Email: robert_rowland2001@yahoo.co.uk

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Paul 01278 782714

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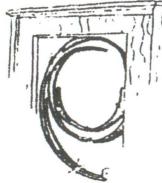
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Price: £2,150 ono

Brian Davey 0208 398 2141 or mobile 07973 506869



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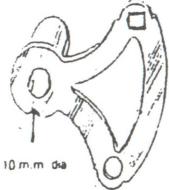


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CHROMED 7 ball win
gallery. 6 x 1. 9/16

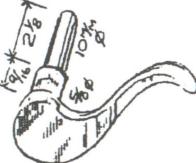
CHROMED TRIGGER
FRONT



CHROMED PAYOUT BOWL

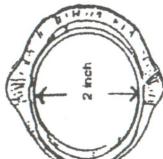


2.5 inch dia cup 2 x 0.25 inch long
squares at 3.75 inch centres.

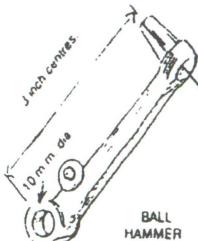


TRIGGER

CHROMED KNOB SHIELD



2 x tapped M5 fixing holes on
extended nipples 2. 1/2 centres.



BALL
HAMMER



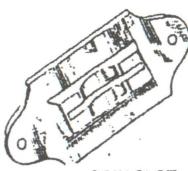
SPANDRELLS



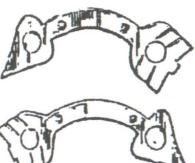
ALLWIN SPARES

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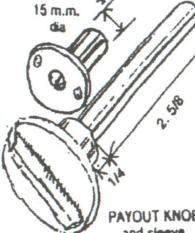
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